



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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I pointed to this as among the modern ways of making the "poor man" our heir. Then I linked the tale I had told them to the pathetic event of the Prince's death—to the deep sorrow of the Royal parents, and I asked them to pray that out of all this grief might come a great national blessing, and that from what must now seem to the bereaved father and mother an "endless sorrow," might grow that healing tree of life—increased sympathy with and power to bless the "poor man."

I said, "Will you ask God to comfort them, and show them how to do this?" and the earnest little faces and tight hug of response showed how true and warm was the sympathy of the little hearts. My youngest—our "baby"—said to me at her prayer-time, "I hope God will comfort the Queen, and that the boy will come again." Although she had blended the fact of the young Prince's death with that of "The Boy of Egremont," I did not think that that made less real this little prayerful aspiration for him whom we surely trust will "come again" in a blissful immortality.

A Mother of England's Children.

OBJECT TEACHING; OR, WORDS AND THINGS.

PART I.

Her eyes are open;
Aye, but their sense is shut.

Shakespeare.

OBJECT TEACHING has so much in common with other kinds of teaching, especially with language lessons and information lessons, that it is frequently confused with them. The distinction between them is, however, of the utmost importance, and the true nature of Object Teaching can hardly be made clear without drawing the distinction.

My first point, therefore, will be to show what Object Teaching has, in common with Language Teaching, or, in other terms, the relation of Words to Things.

If an object be presented to our eyes for the first time, we cannot at once obtain a clear vision of all its separate parts and qualities. By fixing our attention we become aware of a number of different parts and qualities, which we make out one after the other in more or less rapid succession, but the mental image of the object which we obtain in this way is far from clear or well defined. The object as it is first viewed by the inner vision is like a mass of hills in a sea of mist. Just as the numberless summits are there massed together into one ill-defined elevation of land, so the parts and qualities of the object are massed together into a vague multitude about which we can say little that is precise. The process of arriving at definition and precision is one of analysis. Out of the confused mass of impressions, first one emerges into clearness, and then another, until the division of the whole is as complete as our mind can make it. The process of analysis of an unfamiliar object is far from easy, because each separate quality and part exists in the object as a portion of an undivided whole. A piece of lump

sugar, for instance, is to a young child a composite whole which he cannot analyse for himself. Older persons can say that it is white, hard, sweet, sparkling, and crystalline ; but we cannot present to the child the whiteness, or the hardness, or any of the other qualities as separate objects outside and independent of the lump. We can only place beside the sugar other white things, such as salt, milk, fat, cotton, and direct attention to the quality which they have in common—namely, whiteness. In this way only we can guide the child to make for itself the mental effort which is needed for reaching the abstract conception whiteness, and if we wish to lead him to the conception of hardness, sweetness, and the rest, we must proceed in the same way. The process seems to prove that language is practically essential for success in such acquisition of knowledge, and the truth is, as we shall see more and more clearly in the sequel, that, apart from “words,” there are for human science no “things,” because the analysis of a whole into its parts can proceed but a very little way without words. Again, after we have taken notice of the various parts and qualities of an object, and have given each a name successively, what is there to fix these parts in the mind as complements of one whole, but the name which we give to the whole object ? Essential as the word is for analysis, it is quite as necessary for synthesis—that is, for re-uniting in thought what our thought has separated.

There is another mental process which the word greatly assists. In the presence of a new object, if it is sufficiently startling in its nature, we forget ourselves and are lost in the object. Self-consciousness vanishes. We can no longer say “That is an object, and this is I.” We are in that strange condition of mind which supervenes when we witness a fine soliloquy well acted on the stage—say, Hamlet’s “To be or not to be,” or a love scene. If the actors are really successful, the scene before us does not seem to be going on in our presence. The thought of ourselves as present would be a disagreeable feeling of intrusion. In certain states of mind the inner and outer are blended into one. When the consciousness of the distinction between the “I” and the “not I,” that is, between the “I” and the object, begins to arise, it is language which defines and renders permanent the distinction. Disturbed by a sudden peal of thunder in the night, we wake in a confused state of mind till the word “thunder” occurs to us, and seems

to extricate us from the feeling of “not knowing our own selves.” In this way it comes about that speech may be regarded as an act of deliverance for the understanding. When from amidst the whirl of sensations which crowd in upon it, or from the overpowering effect produced by a single group of impressions, the mind has obtained mastery over itself and reduced confusion to order, there arises a feeling of triumph which finds expression for itself by means of words and often by gestures as well. The internal sense of victory reacts upon the body, and the body reflects the feeling of the mind. The reaction of the mind on the bodily organism causes the utterance of the word, and now there are present in the consciousness two things—the object known and the utterance of the sound or the name of the object. These two are intimately associated, and so strong is the association that afterwards one alone, if both are not present, calls the other into consciousness. I see, for instance, a lake before me, and I cry “Windermere.” Or I read of Windermere in a book, and I think at once of my mental image of the lake ; I see a view of the lake in my mind’s eye. This association occurs where the knowledge of the object and of the name of the object have been associated in acquisition. Where word and object are thus associated the word is in a special way the mark or indication or sign of the object, and such words are significant words in a special sense of the word significant. The utterance of them is weighted with a mental reproduction of the thing signified, and it is by no means so rapidly or so easily made as the utterance of a word that reproduces no mental image, and is a mere sound. If words were more significant in this sense than they are to most people, orators would use fewer of them, for really significant words, inasmuch as they thus carry weight, pass much more slowly through the mind than the others, which are as empty ships that float lightly and sail quickly, owing to the absence of cargo.

The word then mediates between the mind and the object. The object is without us, and the knowledge of the object is within us. Between the inner and the outer—that is, between the object and our knowledge of the object—comes the word as a support to the mind in mastering the object. By means of the word the mind can set itself opposite to the object, and separate itself from it more completely than during the actual contemplation which precedes recognition of an object. The

spoken word is well suited for mediating between mind and object, because of its double nature. It is on the one hand physical and outward, being the product of the bodily organism, and on the other hand inward and immaterial, because it is called into being by the mind, and expresses an inward impression. Inasmuch as the nature of the spoken word is inward, it is related to inward impressions; but inasmuch as its nature is also outward, being a physical thing, it helps the mind to present to itself its inward impressions as outward objects. Every one may notice that as soon as a young child has once recognised and named a particular object (no matter whether he invents a name for himself or imitates his mother), he loves to keep on repeating the name as often as he sees the object. The pleasure of recognition is marked by the utterance of the word.

However long we regard an object we do not take in all that can be known about it, but only so much of it as we ourselves are able to comprehend. A name, in the same way, does not indicate all the qualities of a thing, but only the most prominent. The baby child calls his dog "bow-wow"; that is to say one single lively impression, that of barking, is named and taken to represent a large collection of impressions. A number of separate impressions are by means of the word "bow-wow" converted into a concise whole, and in place of several separate items of observation made successively and often at long intervals, we now have in the word or name a brief summary of them recalling the whole. The word which thus summarises for us what we know of an object serves as a fixed point around which we can group all else which we may afterwards learn about the object. The child hears the dog bark, and sees it run, jump, pursue, catch flies, and worry the cat, and the name dog in the end calls up all these qualities. Then inasmuch as the child sees other dogs behaving like his own, he uses the name dog to describe the whole fused mass of similar impressions, and "dog" becomes a class name. Every fresh impression about a dog which the child acquires is associated with the name "dog," which thus collects a wider and fuller meaning. The word then may be regarded as a net spread by the mind to catch the results of new observations and retain them. The word "mountain," for instance, remains the same, although after seeing the Lake Mountains in England, the mountains of

Central Europe, and the Swiss Mountains, my conception of the thing changes very considerably. Words in this way lose something of their original meaning. "Wolf" meant originally "the tearer," and "mouse" meant "the thief." "Lady" meant (perhaps) "bread-kneader." Who thinks of such meanings now? Thus it is clear that the current meaning of a word often depends upon the connection in which it is used at the time, and not upon its etymology, as is amusingly shown in the little invitation and acceptance of two French ladies which I read lately in a French comic paper:—"Voulez vous *five-o'clocker* chez moi?" "Avec plaisir. Mais à quelle heure?"

The word, then, briefly to resume its uses, aids us to analyse an object into its component parts. We look at a dog, and see it sometimes running, sometimes sleeping, sometimes black, but in every different case we see the dog as a whole. Our eyes do not divide for us the thing dog and the action running. It is by use of the word dog that we are able to separate in thought the object dog from its various properties and activities. The more searching and varied our observations, and the more we increase our knowledge of the properties of an object, the richer becomes the significance of the word, and the more refined and definite becomes our knowledge of the thing.

By use of the word, again, we can group together many different but similar impressions. We call many shades of green—apple, emerald, sage, and grass—all green. Words help us to restore to consciousness at pleasure past impressions of objects, and make it possible for us to recall particular impressions out of a cumbrous or perhaps ill-defined mass. Words give us a mastery over our stores of past impressions which we should not possess if the whole of every object had to be recalled every time we wished to speak of it, instead of so much of it as is sufficient for our immediate purpose. By words we can study the properties of things independently of things themselves, and by words we can arrive at the conception of general ideas and enter into the domain of science. Without words we can look at objects and know them as animals do, but we can have little or no science. Object teaching should bring us into ever closer touch with objects, but to effect this contact the right use of the right words is indispensable.

The mind has no ready-made knowledge of things and no innate ideas or conceptions. At the most it has aptness for

acquiring them. Step by step, by daily contact with the outer world, by action and reaction of itself on objects and of objects on itself, by the reception of impressions and by the elaboration of them through internal processes, the mind wins its laborious way to that degree of intellectual, moral, and spiritual elevation of which it is capable. The main business of the Object Teacher is to enable the learner to form correct impressions, and there is no more important branch of instruction.

On a particular occasion during the recent visit of the Empress of Germany to London it became the duty of the reporters of the public journals to describe Her Imperial Majesty's dress. Subsequently the *Globe* collected the descriptions of the costume as they were given by different reporters, to this effect :—

The *Times* stated that the Empress was in "gold brocade," while, according to the *Daily News*, she wore a "sumptuous white silk dress." The *Standard*, however, took another view: "The Empress wore something which we trust it is not vulgar to call a light mauve." On the other hand, the *Daily Chronicle* was hardly in accord with any of the others: "To us it seemed almost a sea-green, and yet there was now a cream and now an ivory sheen to it."

No wonder that the *Globe* asks emphatically, "What *did* the Empress wear?" Like the reporters, we look at a lady's dress. We then shut our eyes and try to recall what we saw. We have in our mind a mental image of the dress. Similar mental images are the starting-point of all knowledge. If the impression first received is wanting in clearness and precision, if the mind cannot assimilate the impression, or if it cannot express in words what the impression is, as in the case of the above reporters, the mental image will not be an improvement upon the impressions on which it is based, but will be full of confusion and obscurity. A clear mental image can only be formed by trained attention to impressions from objects, by which the parts and characteristics are carefully grasped, and impressions nearly alike clearly distinguished from impressions really alike. Vague, obscure, and shifting impressions of an object will never help us to know it rightly, however frequently they are made. Four reporters take note of a dress, and are at variance in describing its colour.

Another reason for the need of trained attention to impres-

sions is to be found in the fact that our mental image of a particular object, when provided with a name, soon passes from being particular and individual, and supplies us with a conception of a class. At first we name a particular animal, dog. We afterwards think of all kinds of dogs under the name dog. Any particular dog which we note is seen in connection with many special characteristics, such as size, colour, action, and the like; whereas our general conception of "dog" only retains the most general impressions. The content of the class name—the name dog as applied to all individual dogs—must needs be much more vague and indefinite than the same name when applied to a particular dog which we are looking at. Our general notions, therefore, although based on impressions from objects, can never be as clear and full and free from vagueness as the result of the original studies of particular objects upon which they are based. How important, therefore, that the study of such impressions of individual objects should be as exact as it admits of being made, for otherwise our conceptions are like a copy of an ill-drawn picture, which besides suffering from the defects of all copies, has this additional disadvantage, that it exaggerates the original imperfection of the first picture.

The trained use of the senses is not only necessary to the man of science, whose pursuits are wholly based on the study of objects, but to the artist, who needs a vivid and accurate perception of all the parts and relations of the objects which he represents, and even to the ordinary artisan, if he is to introduce into his work any original thought or design. By the early training of the senses a man may learn to look out for what is new in objects, and to find it where the less carefully trained sees only what is familiar. The link between the inner world of the mind and objects, or the outer world, is speech. Speech is a spiritual hand for grasping objects by the mind. By words we fix in our minds our own impressions, and by words we communicate them to other people. Words express the relation of our consciousness to objects, and we mostly comprehend objects as words present them to our minds. Want of language, want of words filled with clear, definite meaning, is the greatest hindrance to culture. Object teaching, then, should, in connection with language teaching, form the children's conceptions, and supply them with a good store of significant words, together with a knowledge of the right way to apply them. Object

Teaching places children closely in contact with nature and human nature, the two sources of human knowledge and moral experience. There is a knowledge of words which is really a knowledge of things. Object Teaching is the reconciliation of the old antithesis between them.

Having described the end and aim of Object Teaching, I now come to its method. The key to the art of training the senses is analysis. An object presented to a child for the first time gives him a confused set of impressions. The child must be shown how to divide this whole into convenient parts in an orderly manner. His attention must be directed first to one part and then to another, and afterwards the bearing of one part on another must be carefully worked out. After this analysis or study of detail the object must be again studied as a whole. It should never, after being thus pulled to pieces, be left in fragments, as it were, but the careful division of the separate parts should be followed by a reconstruction of them into the original whole. Such an attentive study of an object must replace the hasty, fugitive, and unstable glance which usually satisfies a child. In studying an object it should not be forgotten that in nature things are not separate and independent existences; the attention must not be so wholly confined to the object and its parts as to allow the child to forget its relation to other things. Let the child see what part the object plays in its usual surroundings, and dwell upon its material, its origin, its use, its hurtfulness, its opposites, and its resemblances.

Even children can study a particular object thoroughly up to a certain point, and the habit thus acquired extends itself to objects which are not treated of by the teacher in school. In fact, the right sort of Object Teaching develops a faculty of study which is of infinitely more consequence than the actual information obtained. The faculty which is developed is of universal application, while the knowledge of the object studied in developing it is necessarily limited and restricted. If I have studied with attention a very few of the manifestations of the effects of gravity, and have really assimilated them, I am able to study other forces with greater ease. The use I can make of my knowledge depends not so much on what I can write down in an examination—often a cumbrous and superfluous store—as upon the way in which I have been taught. Teaching of

this kind cannot be a hasty process. Time is needed for the mind to play freely over the object, and time is needed for recapitulation. After each part or characteristic has been considered separately, it should be again reconsidered in relation to the whole. As there are three characteristics of good powers of observation which the detailed analysis of an object tends to promote—namely, speed in responding to impressions, infallibility in interpreting them, and exhaustiveness in examining their origin; so there are three advantages which recapitulation secures—namely, vividness of the mental image, strength of mental hold upon it, and versatility in employing it.

Necessarily, therefore, in true Object Teaching the object must be kept frequently and long under the child's notice, and his memory must be checked by repeated comparison of his mental image with the actual object. Hence drawing—that best external evidence of the inner mental image—or modelling, should be resorted to as early as possible. Even a very young child would early learn to reproduce from memory the shape of a particular ivy leaf, and then match the drawing or model with the original. The temptation of the teacher is to trust to the child's memory, which is usually a perfect lumber-room of confused and inaccurate impressions. The object should be withdrawn from sight bit by bit while it is being studied. Where it is proved that the child has a vague or inaccurate notion of any part, let that vagueness be cleared away by fresh reference to the object. In this way the carrying power of the memory is surely, if slowly, increased. One of the ablest specimens of Object Teaching in its elementary stage is printed in Mrs. Sewell's *Life*, and I can give no better illustration of my meaning.

A little boy—we will say about four years old—runs from the garden to his mother, "Oh! mother, do come and look at this beautiful thing on the rose-tree; I want to know what it is." "I am busy now, Charles; tell me what it is like. What colour is it?" "Red, I think." "Oh, I suppose it is a ladybird." "Oh no, it is a great deal bigger than a ladybird." "Well, perhaps it is a tiger-moth—that has two red wings. Look, like this"—and the mother slightly sketches the tiger-moth on the slate. "Oh, no, it is not at all like that." "Is it this colour?" "No, it is not so red as that." "Perhaps it is the colour of this mahogany chair?" "No, not just like that." "Perhaps like this nut?"

"Yes, it is very much like that." "Well, this is light brown, not red. But what shape is this beautiful creature?" "Oh, I think it is round." The mother draws a round figure on the slate. "Is it like this?" "No, not so round." The mother makes a long thing in the form of a long caterpillar. "No, it is not so long." The mother then draws an oval. "Yes, it is very much like that." "And has it no feet?" "I think it has some feet." "How many—I suppose two feet, like the birds? Are they like these?" "Oh no! I am sure they are not like those." "You had better go and look at it again, and come and tell me." "Mother, it has six legs." The mother draws two on one side and four on the other. "Is that right?" "No, it has three on each side." The mother corrects it. "Is that right?" "Yes, that is really right."

"You will see by this example," says Mrs. Sewell, "how much of accurate observation this lesson will have taught the child. Children will never weary of this sort of instruction, and it is impossible to calculate how much the child will gain; very soon he will endeavour to guide his mother's fingers to the correct form, and next endeavour to form the figure himself. The value of the habit of accurate observation is not to be told. In this way a child obtains the power of using his own mind, and he learns the value of correct language and description. Had the mother simply complied with the child's request, and gone into the garden and said 'That is a stag-beetle,' the subject would have been closed and the child's interest quenched. Had a servant been with the child she probably would leave the question thus: 'Oh, that's a nasty beetle; don't touch it or it will kill you with those great nippers; come away from it.' Then the child would not only have its interest quenched, but would be taught to fear a harmless insect, and the creature would become an object of disgust."

If, then, Object Teaching be what I have attempted to describe it, the instruction must commence with an object or specimen. To talk to the children about things not seen during the lesson is not Object Teaching. Again, a conversation about all kinds of things in a superficial way is certainly a valuable lesson for a certain purpose. It conveys general information and corrects a tendency to pedantry, which is the besetting sin of all school work, but it is not Object Teaching. Talking over many things is not the same in effect as talking of nothing, but it is practice

in conversation, the use of words, mustering ideas, quickness in recalling past impressions, and grammar, rather than training the powers of observation and attention or laying the foundation of knowledge by developing the faculties which we possess for attaining knowledge. Nothing should be called an object lesson which does not improve the senses of the child and make him able, of himself, to advance in the true path of acquiring knowledge. The information conveyed in chats and lectures ends with the passive reception of it. The child is suffocated with facts, like the Strasburg geese, but the facts are not imparted in such a way as to form the starting-point of further learning, or to lay the foundation of a method of observation and research. In concluding this brief account of the theory of Object Teaching I ask, What is the aim of Object Teaching? Is it talk? Is it the mastery of language? Is it the mustering of ideas? Is it conveying general information? All these kinds of instruction are needed, but they are not properly Object Teaching. This begins with a keen, many-sided, and accurate observation of a familiar specimen.

T. G. R.